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CHAPTER III

YOKUTS TRADE

A WUKCHUMNE TRADING EXPEDITION

One of my most interesting expeditions with Indians was made when I took the Henry Ichow and George Garcia families from the Kaweah River to Dunlap to gather clay for pottery, the black paint used in their ceremonies, and to trade basketry materials. The *Wukchumne* gathered *hupud* (hoo'-pud), or cladium roots, and *chawkish*, or bunch-grass, along the Kaweah. These they traded at Dunlap for *muhnokits* (muh-no'-kits), or black sword-fern root, and *ahnup*, the red outer wood of redbud. For several years I had been planning this expedition and was all expectation as we prepared to start.

Leaving Tulare at five a. m., I drove to the Kaweah River below Woodlake and began loading. There was a fifty pound flour sack full of small bundles of hupud and a large bundle of chawkish. There were several nests of baskets, tied up in flour sacks that had been ripped open. In them were brushes made of soap root husk, salt from salt grass and several roots and herbs with which I was not familiar. Some of these I placed in the trunk on the back of the car. Then I began loading the car. It was a seven passenger sedan, but it was surely stuffed when we were all aboard.

Ichow weighed at least three hundred pounds—I slightly less. We, with William and Virginia Garcia, occupied the front seat and from it to the dash and the top. Ada Ichow, Katie Garcia, her daughter, and the three oldest Garcia girls, Letha, Helen, and Melchor, piled into the rear seat. George, Johnnie and Howard Garcia occupied the two folding seats. Every inch of seat room in the rear compartment was taken up, either by Indians, or by bundles of trade materials.

The first stop was made on the grade leading down into the old Chris Evans' Rattlesnake Ranch, below old Aukland. I heard a grunt from Ada, which Henry translated into, "You stop here." I stopped and immediately learned that the old Pierce Arrow was blowing like a steam engine.

Ada and Ichow began giving instructions in the Wukchumne language. All but the youngest children scattered along the road and began searching the cut bank. The cut had

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123 438 484 been made into a mass of partially decomposed granite, with an overburden of about ten feet of soil. Soon Ada grunted again, and the whole expedition gathered around her. With a sharpened stick, which she used to dig basketry roots, she was digging into the soft granite and removing chunks of a heavy [317] blue-black material which she called *Kodeen* (Ko'-de-en). This, 135] I have since been informed, is a form of crude graphite, which was deposited in crevices in the top of the granite.

386 While the rest dug, Ichow explained to me how the old-time Yokuts used to prepare paint from this material and how they used to paint with it after it was prepared. A fire of dry oak wood was burned down to a heap of red coals. Then the graphite was dumped into a hole in the center and covered with hot coals from the rim of the fire bed. This was left until the entire bed of coals was reduced to ashes. After the whole mass had cooled, the burned graphite was carefully removed and placed in a bag of tanned deer-skin. Ichow later burned some of the material we gathered that day, but he did not follow exactly his own directions.

When the wood had burned to a mass of red-hot coals, Ichow placed the graphite in a portion of the bottom of a broken cast-iron kettle and sank it in the coals where it soon became red-hot. Within a couple of hours he removed the container and set it aside to cool. When I examined the material I found that it had changed character and color. Instead of being composed of several lumps of hard, heavy, blue-black material, almost exactly like the Rising Sun Stove Polish in use when I was a boy, it had slacked into a fine, sooty, black powder, in appearance like commercial lamp-black, but heavier.

In this manner was gathered and prepared the black paint [302] for which the ceremonies of the Yokuts tribes were famous. Officials who danced in these ceremonies painted their bodies black. In some tribes white stripes were painted across the chest and abdomen, vertical white stripes on the legs and arms, and large white spots on the face.

[439] White for this painting was prepared from diatomaceous earth, some of which was traded from Yokuts who lived in the Coast Range of mountains. One deposit of this crude chalk lies [317] near Lompoc and another near Crow Creek in Western Stanislaus County. It provided a pure white pigment.

Both of the above pigments were mixed with plant juices [324] to form a paint. One of my authorities, *Pahmit*, a *Dumna*

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Yokuts from Friant, informed me that his people used only oil from the seeds of the chilocothe, or wild cucumber. The other, Ichow, stated that the Wukchumnes mixed this oil with sap from the tall, blue-grey milkweed from which they gathered fiber for manufacturing string. This same sap was also made into chewing gum. In my own experience I have found such gum to be exceptionally durable, and anything but palatable.

Crowned with the standard Yokuts *Juk* (Jook), or dance headdress, the dancers were certainly spectacular performers when they surrounded the glowing fire during the annual dance for the dead. It is not surprising that pioneer whites who saw this dance likened the performers to dancing skeletons.

After about ten pounds of graphite had been gathered, Ada grunted again and the entire party began searching the soil above the decomposed granite. Then came another grunt and again we all gathered about her. She dug from the soil a round hard nodule of light-colored clay. In about two hours three of these nodules were excavated and, together with the graphite, were loaded into the car among the thirteen pairs of feet.

Where the grocery store had once stood at the old ghost village of Aukland we unloaded again and ate our picnic lunch in the shade of an oak tree. Ada murmured a few soft Yokuts words and Ichow explained for her that the old buildings just below us were once the home of Perry Byrd, father of Mollie Byrd who became the wife of the famous outlaw and train bandit, Chris Evans. When the Ichows first saw Chris he was working for Tulare County. He came along with a road grader and interrupted their work when they were gathering black paint material.

As we ate our lunch, Ichow explained to me that for many generations his people had visited the place, which they called *Hutudu* (Hoo'-too-doo), Hoot-Owl Place, to gather the material for black paint and the clay for making pottery. Although the deposits were in the range of the Wuksatche tribe, "They were our good friends and they let us come and dig whenever we wanted to. We had a big picnic when we came and traded basket roots, just like we do today," said Ichow.

Our work and lunch had delayed us until it was almost two o'clock in the afternoon; so I told the Indians we would have to hurry, as I had a dinner engagement in Tulare. In less than a minute all were packed in the car and we were on the road to

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Dunlap. None of them seemed to hurry, but with a few soft, murmuring Yokuts words they faded into the car.

At Dunlap we entered the gate of the first Indian camp. I expected them to finish their trading in a few minutes, so we could return to the Kaweah in short order. Although they hurried from the car to the house, I noticed that the sack of hupud and the large bundle of chawkish were left in the car. They visited a few minutes, exchanging news of all the friends and relations. Then Ada grunted and we all trailed back to the car. On we went to another place, where the performance was repeated. I was impatient at this, as the afternoon was fast slipping away. I saw that I would probably be late for that dinner engagement, but I knew better than to say anything.

At the third place we had no more than entered the house than Ada grunted. Letha ran out to the car and carried in the basketry materials. The trade was soon made and in less than five minutes we were on our way back to the Kaweah.

On our return I asked Ichow why Ada had not traded at the first places we visited. He explained that those first people had their bundles of hupud made up too small. I remembered that bundles of hupud were hanging on the walls of the houses, but, until Ichow mentioned it, I had not observed that they were smaller than Ada's bundles. All the way home Ichow and Ada tried hard to explain to me how trading was carried on between the Yokuts tribes and how their bead money was used in connection with it.

According to Ada, bundles of cladium root and redbud wood were made up the same size. But sword-fern root was made up about two-thirds as large. Because, as Ichow translated, "They had to travel a long way to get it and it had to be colored."

Ichow, prompted by a few soft murmurs from the rear seat, explained at great length—great length for a Yokuts—how important it was to have everything put up in the right size. Here is one of his statements. "In them old days them old people don't got scales to weigh with, don't got yard-stick to measure with. They make that black paint all into same size balls, not so big as your baseball. My old grandpa, *Che'-chin*, trade some balls that black paint for some balls white paint when I was a little boy. I see him do it. Both kinds paint they trade was in same size balls."